(54) Title: GENETIC METHOD FOR PRODUCING VIRUS RESISTANT ORGANISMS

(57) Abstract

    The present invention relates to a method of producing a host organism which is resistant to infection by a virus comprising stably incorporating into the genome of said host a DNA sequence encoding a non–viral protein characterized in that said protein has the ability to bind to ssRNA from said virus to form a non–translatable RNA–protein complex. The host organism is preferably a plant. The invention further relates to transgenic plants and plant cells having stably incorporated into its genome a DNA sequence encoding a non–viral protein having the ability to bind to ssRNA from said virus to form a non–translatable RNA–protein complex and to DNA sequences and constructs for use in the method.

GENETIC METHOD FOR PRODUCING VIRUS RESISTANT ORGANISMS

This invention relates to a method of producing
virus resistant organisms, in particular plants, to cells
transformed with DNA coding for single strand RNA binding
proteins, to DNA coding for said single strand RNA
5 binding proteins and to vectors containing said DNA.
During the past decade evidence has accumulated
that plant virus-encoded movement proteins (MPs) are
required to mediate viral spread between plant cells via
plasmodesmata (PD) (reviewed by Lucas and Gilbertson,
10 Ann. Rev. Phytopathol. 32, 397-411 (1994)). Different
viruses use distinct strategies for coding their MPs
(reviewed by Atabekov and Taliansky, Advan. Virus
Research 38, 201-248 (1990)). In particular, the movement
of tobamoviruses is mediated by the 30K protein encoded
15 by a single gene (Deom et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA
87, 3284-3288 (1990); Meshi et al., EMBO J. 6, 2557-2563
(1987)), whereas that of potexviruses, hordeiviruses,
carlaviruses and some furo-like viruses requires the
products of the three overlapping genes (triple gene
20 block, TGB)(for review, see Donald et al., In Fifth
International Symposium on Biotechnology and Plant
Protection: Viral Pathogenesis and Disease Resistance pp
135-147, 1994). The 5'-proximal TGB ORF codes for the
protein possessing the nucleotide binding domain, and the
25 second and third TGB ORFs encode small hydrophobic
proteins (Morozov et al., Biochimie 72, 677-84, (1990);
Jackson et al., Seminars in Virology 2 107-119 (1991)).
Several viral MPs have been localized to PD in
infected plants as well as in transgenic plants that
30 express MP genes (Tomenius et al., Virology 160, 363-71
(1987); Berna et al., Virology 182, 682-89 (1991); Ding
et al., Plant Cell 4 915-28 (1992); Fujiwara et al.,
Plant Cell 5, 1783-94 (1993)), i.e. they need to possess
a PD localization signal to interact with hypothetical
35 host factors (HF) (presumably, the structural proteins of
PD). Two more activities of MPs have been demonstrated:

(i) their ability to increase plasmodesmatal size
exclusion limit (SEL) (Wolf et al., Science 246, 377-79
(1989); Plant Cell 3, 593-604, (1991); Fujiwara et al.,
Plant Cell 5, 1783-94 (1993); Noueiry et al., Cell 76,
5 925-32 (1994); Waigmann et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci.
USA 91, 1933-1937 (1994), Ding et al., Virology 207, 345-
53 (1995); Waigmann and Zambrysky, Plant Cell 7, 2069-
2079 (1995); Angell et al., Virology 216 197-201 (1996))
and (ii) their sequence-independent binding of single-
10 stranded nucleic acids (Citovsky et al., Cell 60, 637-
647, (1990); Plant Cell 4, 397-411 (1992); Osman et al.,
J. Gen. Virol. 74, 2453-57, (1993); Schoumacher et al.,
Virology 188 896-99 (1992); J. Gen. Virol. 75, 3199-3201
(1994); Giesman-Cookmeyer and Lommel, Plant Cell 5, 973-
15 982, (1993); Li and Palukaitis, Phytopathology 83, 1425
(1993); Virology 216, 71-79 (1996); Rouleau et al.,
Virology 204, 254-65 (1994); Pascal et al., Plant Cell 6,
995-1006 (1994); Offei et al., J. Gen. Virol. 76, 1493-96
(1995); Bleykasten et al., J. Gen. Virol. 889-897
20 (1996)). The most thoroughly studied virus-encoded MP is
that of common tobamovirus (TMV UI) (Citovsky et al.,
1990; 1992 J. loc. cit.). A new tobamovirus systemically
infecting crycifer plants (cr TMV) has been recently
isolated and the crTMV genome has been sequenced
25 (Dorokhov et al., FEBS Lett. 350, 5-8 1994). It was
reported that binding of the recombinant crTMV 30K MP to
genomic viral RNA results in the formation of stable
ribonucleoprotein complexes _in vitro_ (Ivanov et al., FEBS
Lett. 346, 217-220 1994). The TGB-coded 58K MP of barley
30 stripe mosaic hordeivirus (BSMV) has co-operative RNA-
binding activity _in vitro_ (Donald et al., 1994 In Fifth
International Symposium on Biotechnology and Plant
Protection: Viral Pathogenesis and Disease Resistance pp
135-47) and forms a RNP-complex with viral RNA _in vivo_ ·
35 (Brakke et al., J. Gen. Virol. 69, 481-89, (1988)). The
TGB-coded counterpart of BSMV 58K MP in potato virus X
(PVX) genome is the 25K MP (Donald et al., 1994 J. loc
cit.). The RNA-binding activity of the 25K MP is

negligible and can be detected only at very low salt
concentrations (Kalinina et al., unpublished data). Thus,
the MPs of tobamovirus and the largest TGB-coded MPs of
hordei- and potexviruses are structurally (and

5 presumably, functionally) distinct proteins with
apparently varying RNA-binding activities.

It has been proposed by Citovsky and Zambrysky
(1991) (Bioessays 13, 373-79) that viral MP and genomic
RNA form an extended, linear ribonucleoprotein (RNP)

10 complex which should be targeted to and translocated
through plasmodesmata (PD). Further, it has been
speculated that the MP-RNA complexes represent a
particular pool of viral RNA molecules which are excluded
from replication being designed for translocation

15 (Citovsky et al., Cell 60, 637-47 (1990)). It is likely
that the MP- and viral RNA-containing RNP represents a
complex that binds to putative plasmodesmal receptors
(HFs).

It is reasonable to hypothesize that once the

20 viral RNA has been associated with the MP molecules into
RNP, it becomes nontranslatable, i.e. that the TMV 30K MP
is able to function as a translational repressor. The
present inventors have found that the MPs of the
tobamoviruses were able to block translation of viral

25 RNAs in vitro. It was proposed that such MP-RNA
complexes: (i) are not infectious in the primary infected
cells and (ii) can be converted into the translatable and
replicatable form in the course of translocation through
the plasmodesmata (Dorokhov et al., (1996) Dolkady

30 Rossiyskoy Akademii Nauk 349, 259-61).

It was now found that some non-viral single-
strand RNA binding proteins have the ability to bind non-
specifically to viral RNA and to inhibit its in vitro
translation. Due to the lack of signals for

35 plasmodesmatal receptor recognition the RNP complex pre-
formed in vitro is non-translatable and non-infective in
planta. Similarly in animal cells ssRNA binding proteins

may bind to viral mRNAs preventing their translation and
thereby blocking the early steps of virus replication.

Accordingly in a first aspect the invention
provides a method of producing a host organism which is
5   resistant to infection by a virus comprising stably
incorporating into the genome of said host a DNA sequence
encoding a non-viral protein characterized in that said
protein has the ability to bind to ssRNA from said virus
to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex.

10   In a preferred embodiment of the first aspect
of the invention there is provided a method of producing
plants which are resistant to infection by a virus
comprising stably incorporating into the genome of said
plant a DNA sequence encoding a non-viral protein
15 characterized in that said protein has the ability to
bind to ssRNA from said virus to form a non-translatable
RNA-protein complex.

Examples of suitable non-viral proteins include
the SSB protein which is able to bind ssRNA and DNA non-
20 specifically (Citovsky et al (1990) Cell 60, 637-47) and
has no nuclear localization signals; the 56-60 kDa
proteins which are responsible for global repression of
mRNA in *Xenopus* oocytes and rabbit reticulocytes and have
been identified as belonging to the Y box family of
25 transcription factors (Murray et al., Proc. Natl. Acad.
Sci. USA 89, 11-15 (1992); Deschamps et al., J. Biol.
Chem. 267, 13799-13802 (1992); Tafuri and Wolffe, J.
Biol. Chem. 268, 24255-24261 (1993); Edvokimova et al.,
J. Biol. Chem. 270, 3186-92 (1995)) and the reticulocyte
30 50kDa protein (p50) (Minich et al., Eur. J. Biochem. 212,
633-38 (1993)). The latter are for example found in
mammalian reticulocytes from rabbit and rat. The
molecular weight of p50 from rabbit calculated from its
gene sequence is 38 kDa (Evdokimova et al., J. Biol.
35 Chem. 270, 3186-3192 (1995)). The M_r of natural p50
isolated from reticulocytes is found to be 50 kDa on SDS-
PAGE apparently due to *in vivo* modification(s) of p50
and/or an abnormal electrophoretic mobility. Translation

in rabbit reticulocyte lysate of _in vitro_ RNA transcript
of p50 gene gave rise to a major band of M_r of about 38
kDa.

The ssRNA binding proteins for use in the
5 method of the invention may bind specifically to the
viral mRNA or may be able to bind to multiple RNA types.

The non-translatability of the RNA-protein
complex in plants may be due to the lack of
disassociation or destabilization of the RNA-protein
10 complex on passage through the plasmodesmata caused for
example by the inability of the non-viral protein to bind
to receptors present in the plasmodesmata. The non-viral
protein may be inherently unable to bind to
plasmodesmatal receptors or may have been altered
15 genetically or chemically such that it can no longer
functionally interact with the receptors.

It is desirable that the ssRNA binding protein
is present in the transgenic host in excess relative to
the viral mRNA in order to achieve optimal translation
20 inhibition. The molar excess required will vary depending
on the ssRNA binding protein used. The molar excess
required will generally be in the range from 2-fold to
250-fold molar excess. The excess required may be
quantified directly _in vitro_ (in cell free protein
25 synthesizing systems) in for example protoplast
inoculation and plant inoculation experiments using RNP
complexes formed at different protein:RNA ratios.

The invention further provides a DNA sequence
encoding a non-viral protein for use in the method of the
30 invention wherein said protein has the ability to bind
ssRNA from a virus to form a non-translatable RNA-protein
complex. The DNA sequence may be predicted from the known
amino acid sequence and DNA encoding the protein may be
manufactured using a standard nucleic acid synthesizer. .
35 The DNA sequence may be incorporated into a DNA construct
or vector in combination with suitable regulatory
sequences (promoter, terminator, enhancer, nuclear
localization signal etc.). The DNA sequence may be placed

under the control of a homologous or heterologous
promoter which may be a constitutive or an inducible
promoter (stimulated by, for example, environmental
conditions, presence of a pathogen, presence of a

5 chemical). The promoter can be a promoter for
pathogenesis-related proteins where induction of the
promoter should occur at the very early stages of virus
replication in order to prevent general toxicity of the
P50 gene product when expressed from a constitutive or

10 developmentally regulated promoter.

Therefore, the expression of for example the
P50 gene can be made specific for cells in which a viral
infection cycle takes place. This can be achieved by
making use of viral subgenomic promoters which are

15 promoters that can only be recognized as being a site for
transcription initiation by a viral replicase. As the
interaction of the replicase and the subgenomic promoter
is virus-specific, a subgenomic promoter can be derived
from the virus for which resistance is desired.

20   Viral subgenomic promoters are genetic elements
which function as cis-acting sequences within the minus-
strand copy of genomic viral RNA from which the synthesis
of subgenomic messengers is initiated. An example of a
viral subgenomic promoter shown to be active when linked

25 to a non-viral gene is the one located in front of the
coat protein gene of Potato Virus X (PVX). During the
replication cycle, the viral replicase binds to the RNA
strand of minus polarity to synthesize a functional coat
protein messenger of plus polarity which can subsequently

30 be translated into the coat protein. The open reading
frame will then be expressed upon viral infection in cis
when incorporated in the viral genome or in trans when
expressed from a stably integrated nuclear gene. The
basic principle of expressing foreign genes using a PVX .

35 based vector having the coat protein subgenomic promoter
has been demonstrated by making use of the marker gene
GUS (Chapman et al., (1992), The Plant Journal 2, 549-
557). A subgenomic promoter will only be active when the

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replication takes place. When the virus is present as such (without being active) the promoter is silent.

In the case of DNA viruses a nuclear localisation signal may be present. The nuclear

5 localization signal may be homologous or heterologous to the non-viral protein and will be chosen to ensure entry of the non-viral single stranded RNA binding protein into the nucleus to facilitate formation of non-translatable complexes with mRNAs derived from the infecting DNA-

10 containing viruses before their export to the cytoplasm. The use of nuclear localization signals is especially preferred.

Such a DNA construct may be cloned or transformed into a biological system which allows

15 expression of the encoded protein or an active part thereof. Suitable biological systems include yeast; cultured cells (such as insect cells, mammalian and plant cells) and plants and animals. In some cases, the expressed protein may subsequently be extracted and

20 isolated for use.

For practical applications the protein may be used to improve the viral resistance of animals and may be used in agriculture to protect crops during the life of the plant. The protein may protect the transgenic

25 organisms from future viral attack.

Plant cells may be transformed with recombinant DNA constructs according to a variety of known methods (Agrobacterium Ti plasmids, PEG mediated protoplast transformation, electroporation, microinjection,

30 microprojectile gun, whiskers). The transformed cells may then in suitable cases be regenerated into whole plants in which the new nuclear material is stably incorporated into the genome and said transgenic plants form a. further feature of the invention. Both transformed

35 monocotyledonous and dicotyledonous plants may be obtained in this way.

The invention further provides a host organism having improved resistance to viral infection said host

containing recombinant DNA which expresses a non-viral
protein capable of binding to ssRNA from said virus to
form a non translatable RNA-protein complex. The host
organism is preferably a plant cell.

5   A transgenic plant of the invention may be used
as a parent in standard plant breeding crosses to develop
hybrids and lines having improved viral resistance.
        The invention extends also to seeds and progeny
derived from the transgenic plants according to the
10 invention wherein said seeds and progeny show improved
resistance to viral infection and have stably
incorporated into their genome a recombinant DNA sequence
encoding a non-viral protein characterized in that said
protein has the ability to bind to ssRNA from said virus
15 to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex.
        Examples of genetic modified plants which may
be produced include field crops, cereals, fruit and
vegetables such as canola, sunflower, tobacco, sugarbeet,
grasses, cotton, soya, maize, wheat, barley, rice,
20 sorghum, tomatoes, mangoes, peaches, apples, pears,
strawberries, bananas, melons, potatoes, carrot, lettuce,
cabbage, onion.
        The invention is further illustrated in the
following non-limiting examples and with reference to the
25 following figures in which:
        Fig. 1: Translation inhibiting activity of the
E.coli SSB protein in wheat germ extracts (WGE). TMV RNA
and E.coli SSB protein at the molar ratio of 100:1 (lane
1), TMV RNA (75 μg/ml) (lane 2), no RNA added (lane 3).
30 Molecular weight markers are shown on the right.
        Fig. 2: Comparison of translation inhibiting
activity of wt TMV, MP, deletion mutant DEL4 MP and the
mammalian protein p50. TMV RNA and the protein were
preincubated and then added to rabbit reticulocyte
35 lysates (RRL): no RNA added (lane 1); DEL4 MP and RNA at
the molar ratio of 500:1 (lane 2); p50 and RNA at the
ratio of 100:1 (lane 3); DEL4 MP and RNA at the ratio of
100:1 (lane 4); wt TMV and RNA at the ratio of 100:1

(lane 5); TMV RNA (75 μg/ml) (lane 6). Molecular weight
markers are shown on the right.

Fig. 3: Construction of rabbit p50 gene-
containing <u>Agrobacterium tumefaciens</u>. GUS = ß-
5 glucuronidase , 35S = 35S Cauliflower promoter,
alpha/beta = PVX nontranslated 5'-leader sequence, T CaMV
= Cauliflower Mosaic Virus polyadenylation signal.

EXAMPLES

10 **EXAMPLE 1**
<u>Inhibition of cell-free translation by E. coli SSB in</u>
<u>vitro</u>
a) Cell Free Translation
    <u>In vitro</u> translation in rabbit reticulocyte
15 lysates (RRL) was as described by Pelham and Jackson
(Eur. J. Biochem 67, 247-56 (1976)) with minor
modifications. The translation mixture (25 μl final
volume) contained 10 μl nuclease-treated lysate
containing 1 mM $CaCl_2$ with hemin; 20 mM Hepes, pH 7.6; 1
20 mM ATP; 200 mM GTP; 2.5 mM magnesium acetate; 100 mM
potassium acetate; 2 mM DTT; 15 mM creatine phosphate; 1
mg creatine phosphokinase; 5 mM cAMP; 2 mM EGTA; 3 μg
yeast tRNA; 125 mM of each essential amino acid excluding
methionine; 800 mCi/ml [^{35}S]-methionine (Amersham, .1000
25 Ci/μmol) and 40-100 mg/ml of virus RNA. Incubation was
carried out at 30°C for 60 min. Translation in wheat germ
extracts (WGE) was performed according to the
manufacturer's (Promega) protocol in the presence of
[^{35}S]-methionine for 60 min at 25°C. Radiolabeled
30 translation products were analyzed by SDS-PAGE and
localized by autoradiography on the dried gel.

b) Inhibition of cell-free translation
    Viral RNA and <u>E.coli</u> SSB (Promega) were
35 preincubated at different molar ratios in 15μl 0.01M
Tris-HCl, pH 7.0 in the presence of human placenta RNase
inhibitor on ice for 1h. Subsequently, 25 μl of RRL or
WGE translation reaction containing [^{35}S]-methionine were

added and translation was allowed to proceed.
Alternatively the SSB preparations and viral RNA were
added without preincubation directly to the cell-free
system.

5

c) In vitro transcription

Radiolabelled 1700-nt RNA fragment was prepared
by in vitro transcription of the linearized plasmid that
contained crTMV MP and CP genes and the 3'nontranslated
10 region of crTMV RNA (Dorokhov et al., FEBS Lett. 350 5-8
(1994)). The plasmid was transcribed with T7 polymerase
(Promega) in the presence of $[\alpha^{32}P]$UTP as described in the
manufacturer's protocol.

15 ### d) Nitrocellulose membrane filter binding (NFB) assays.

Double filter NFB assays were done as described
by Wong and Lohman (1993) (Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 90,
5428-5432). About $300x10^3$ cpm of the $[^{32}P]$ transcript, 2 μg
of unlabelled TMV RNA and different amounts of the <u>E.coli</u>
20 SSB were mixed in 30 μl of binding buffer A (50 mM Tris-
HCl, 1 mM EDTA, pH 7.0, 50 mM NaCl, 1 mM DTT, 1 mg/ml
bovine serum albumin and 10% glycerol). After incubation
on ice for 1h, the mixture was subjected to NFB assay.
The mixture was filtered through two layers at 45-μm
25 nitrocellulose membranes (upper layer of nitrocellulose
blotting membrane Bio Trace NT and lower one of
positively charged blotting membrane Bio Trace HP Gelman
Sciences) using the Slot Blot device (Hoffer S.I.). The
membranes were washed three times with 100 μl buffer A,
30 dried and counted for radioactivity retained using a
liquid scintillation counter (Beckman).

EXAMPLE 2

<u>Inhibition of cell-free translation by reticulocyte p50</u>
35 <u>protein</u>

a) Cell free translation

<u>In vitro</u> translation in rabbit reticulocyte
lysates (RRL) was as described by Pelham and Jackson

(Eur. J. Biochem. 67, 247-56 (1976)) with minor
modifications. The translation mixture (25 μl final
volume) contained 10 μl nuclease-treated lysate
containing 1 mM CaCl$_2$ with hemin; 20 mM Hepes, pH 7.6; 1
5 mM ATP; 200 mM GTP; 2.5 mM magnesium acetate; 100 mM
potassium acetate; 2 mM DTT; 15 mM creatine phosphate; 1
μg creatine phosphokinase; 5 mM cAMP; 2 mM EGTA; 3 μg
yeast tRNA; 125 μg of each essential amino acid excluding
methionine; 800 uCi/ml [^{35}S]-methionine (Amersham, .1000
10 Ci/μmol) and 40-100 μg/ml of virus RNA. Incubation was
carried out at 30°C for 60 min. Translation in wheat germ
extracts (WGE) was performed according to the
manufacturer's (Promega) protocol in the presence of
[^{35}S]-methionine for 60 min at 25°C. Radiolabeled
15 translation products were analyzed by SDS-PAGE and
localized by autoradiography on the dried gel.

b) Inhibition of cell-free translation

     Viral RNA and reticulocyte 50 kDa protein
20 (Minich et al., 1993 Eur. J. Biochem. 212 633-638) were
preincubated at different molar ratios in 15μl 0.01M
Tris-HCl, pH 7.0 in the presence of human placenta RNase
inhibitor on ice for 1h. Subsequently, 25 μl of RRL or
WGE translation reaction containing [^{35}S]-methionine were
25 added and translation was allowed to proceed.
Alternatively the 50 kDa preparations and viral RNA were
added without preincubation directly to the cell-free
system.

30 **c) In vitro transcription**

     Radiolabelled 1700-nt RNA fragment was prepared
by in vitro transcription of the linearized plasmid that
contained crTMV MP and CP genes and the 3'nontranslated
region of crTMV RNA (Dorokhov et al., FEBS Lett. 350 5-8
35 (1994)). The plasmid was transcribed with T7 polymerase
(Promega) in the presence of [α^{32}P]UTP as described in the
manufacturer's protocol.

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d) Nitroc llulose membran filter binding (NFB) assays

Double filter NFB assays were done as described
by Wong and Lohman (1993) (Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci USA 90
5428-32). About 300x10^3 cpm of the [^{32}P] transcript, 2 μg
5 of unlabelled TMV RNA and different amounts of the 50 kDa
protein were mixed in 30 μl of binding buffer A (50 mM
Tris-HCl, 1 mM EDTA, pH 7.0, 50 mM NaCl, 1 mM DTT, 1
mg/ml bovine serum albumin and 10% glycerol). After
incubation on ice for 1h, the mixture was subjected to
10 NFB assay. The mixture was filtered through two layers at
45-μm nitrocellulose membranes (upper layer of
nitrocellulose blotting membrane Bio Trace NT and lower
one of positively charged blotting membrane Bio Trace HP
Gelman Sciences) using the Slot Blot device (Hoffer
15 S.I.). The membranes were washed three times with 100 μl
buffer A, dried and counted for radioactivity retained
using a liquid scintillation counter (Beckman).

EXAMPLE 3
20 <u>Inhibition of virus multiplication by reticulocyte 50 kDa
protein in protoplasts and in planta</u>
a) Plant inoculation

TMV RNA and the reticulocyte 50 kDa protein
(Minich et al., Eur. J. Biochem. 212 633-638 (1993)) were
25 preincubated at different molar ratios in 50 ml 0.01 M
Tris-HCl, pH 7.5 in the presence of human placenta RNase
inhibitor on ice for 1h. The opposite half-leaves of
<u>Nicotiana glutinosa</u> L. were inoculated by the preformed
RNP and TMV RNA, respectively.
30

b) Protoplast culture

Isolation of the mesophyll protoplasts from
barley leaves, electroporation of the protoplasts with
preformed MP-RNA complexes or viral RNA was carried out.
35 according to Zelenina et al. (1992) (FEBS Lett. 296 276-
270). In a separate experiment the protoplasts were
inoculated in the presence of polyethylene glycol (PEG)
as described by Blum et al. (Virology 169, 51-61 (1989)).

Inoculated protoplasts were incubated for   at room
temperature and TMV accumulation was determined by the
ELISA double antibody sandwich method (DAS-ELISA) using
serial TMV dilutions as concentration standards. Antisera
5 to TMV were produced in rabbits by a series of
intravenous and subcutaneous injections. Sheep anti-
rabbit immunoglobulins were obtained from N.F. Hamaleya
Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology, Moscow.

10 **RESULTS OF EXAMPLES 1, 2 AND 3**
            After incubation of ^{32}P-labelled crTMV RNA
transcripts with the purified E.coli SSB protein and p50
preparations, the incubation mixtures were analyzed by a
double filter nitrocellulose membrane filter binding
15 assay described by Wong and Lohman (1993) (Wong, I., and
Lohman, T.M. (1993), Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 90, 5428-
5432).
            This method is based on the principle that all
RNP complexes are retained by the nitrocellulose, whereas
20 protein-free RNA is trapped on the positively charged
membrane placed beneath the nitrocellulose. Table 1 shows
that at the E.coli SSB protein: RNA molar ratio of 100:1,
31% of the RNA was retained on the nitrocellulose
membrane. In the same protein: RNA molar ratio p50
25 retains 60% RNA. However, at the ratio of 100:1 both
E.coli SSB protein and p50 completely inhibit TMV RNA
translation (Fig. 1 and 2 respectively).
            In further experiments p50 was used. Table 2
and 3 show that p50:RNA complex preformed at the molar
30 ratio 100:1 is noninfectious in protoplasts and in
plants. These results imply that noninfectivity of the
RNP complexes was due to their nontranslatability rather
than to RNA degradation.

Table 1

Detection of the RNP complexes by nfb assays[a]

Preparation used	Molar protein: RNA ratio upon incubation	Per cent of radio-activity[b] retained on	
		Nitro-cellulose (protein-RNA complexes	Positively charged membrane (free RNA)
RNA		0.0	100.0
E.coli SSB protein - RNA complex	100:1	31.0±6.1	69.0±6.1
p50-RNA complex	100:1	60.1±4.6	39.9±4.6

[a] The mean values for 6 independent experiments are presented

[b] The total radioactivity of $[^{32}P]$-RNA retained on the nitrocellulose and on the positively charged membrane minus nonspecific background retention of free $[^{32}P]$-RNA on the nitrocellulose was taken as 100%. The nonspecific background retention was less than 1% of RNA radioactivity retained by a positively charged membrane.

Table 2

Examination of the ability of RNP complexes to infect
protoplasts

Inoculum	Molar protein - RNA ratio upon preincubation	Amount of TMV accumulated in mesophyll proto- plasts (ng per 5×10^6) proto- plasts[a]	
		Exp. 1	Exp.2
TMV RNA	-	650	1560
p50-RNA complex	100:1	0	0
Mock inoculation	-	0	0

[a] Protoplasts were electroporated with TMV RNA or TMV RNA
preincubated with MPs. The amount of RMV RNA was 8 μg in
50 μl of inoculum. Concentration of TMV was determined by
DAS-ELISA.

Table 3

Infectivity of TMV RNA complexes with the protein p50 of
reticulocyte mRNPS

Protein	Infectivity: mean number of local lesions per half-leaf of N.glutinosa[a]			
	Experiment 1		Experiment 2	
	RNA	Protein/ RNA complex	RNA	Protein/ RNA complex
p50 - RNA complex	139±48.0	2±0.8	179±20.0	1±0.36

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(a) Opposite halves of the same leaf of N.glutinosa were
inoculated with the protein - TMV RNA complexes and free
TMV RNA; the mean values for 8-10 inoculated leaves are
presented in three independent experiments. The molar
5   protein: RNA ratio was 100:1. 5 µl of inoculum applied to
each half of the leaf contained 1 µg of TMV RNA.

EXAMPLE 4
Creation of rabbit p50 gene-containing transgenic tobacco
10 **a) construction of rabbit p50 gene-containing
Agrobacterium tumefaciens**
        The p50 gene was isolated by BamHI-EcoRV
digestion of a p50 gene-containing plasmid Bluescript II
SK+ (relevant part of the plasmid shown in Fig. 3A) and
15 ligated into pRTαßGUS (Zelenina et al. (FEBS Lett. 296,
276-270 (1992), Fig. 3B) digested with XbaI (blunted with
Klenow) and BamHI. This vector provides for the PVX
nontranslated 5' leader sequence and a translational
enhancer. Thus, the pRTαßp50 plasmid (Fig. 3C) was
20 obtained.
        The HindIII fragment from pRTαßp50 was inserted
into pBin19 digested with HindIII to obtain pBinαßp50.
A.tumefaciens was transformed with pBinαßp50 and seven
positive clones were selected by Southern blot
25 hybridization.

**b) transformation of tobacco with p50 gene-containing
A.tumefaciens LBA 4404**
        Nicotiana tabacum (Samsun) leaf disks were
30 transformed with A.tumefaciens LBA 4404 containing
pBinαßp50. Tobacco disks transformed with the transformed
A.tumefaciens clones no. 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7 produced 60-70
shoots. 20 Shoots were taken for rooting and subsequent
testing with rabbit polyclonal antibody against p50   .
35 produced in E.coli.

EXAMPLE 5

P50 gene under the control of a subgenomic viral promoter

        In order to express P50, the gene is operably
linked to the PVX coat protein subgenomic promoter. This
5   chimeric construct is subsequently inserted in antisense
orientation between the CaMV 35S promoter and terminator.
Upon expression in transgenic plants activity of the CaMV
35S promoter results in RNA which contains a functional
P50 gene which can be transcribed into a translatable
10 mRNA only by the viral replicase. This construct is
subsequently introduced in a transformation vector
suitable for Agrobacterium-mediated plant transformation
e.g. pBIN19 which contains the NPTII gene under control
of the nopaline synthetase promoter for selection of
15 transgenic shoots during the transformation procedure.
        The binary vector is transferred to
Agrobacterium tumefaciens LBA 4404 using a triparental
mating procedure in which pRK2013 is used to mobilize the
binary vector from Escherichia coli to Agrobacterium
20 tumefaciens. The resulting Agrobacterium strain is used
to transform Nicotiana tabacum L. Transformed tobacco
plants are assessed for resistance by challenging with
PVX.

CLAIMS

1. A method of producing a host organism which is resistant to infection by a virus comprising stably incorporating into the genome of said host a DNA sequence encoding a non-viral protein characterized in that said
5　protein has the ability to bind to ssRNA from said virus to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex.

2. The method according to claim 1 wherein said host organism is a plant.

3. The method according to claims 1 and 2,
10　characterized in that the non-viral protein is selected from the group consisting of the SSB protein, the 56-60 kDa proteins which are responsible for global repression of mRNA in Xenopus oocytes and rabbit reticulocytes belonging to the Y box family of transcription factors
15　and the reticulocyte 50kDa protein (p50).

4. A DNA sequence encoding a non-viral protein for use in the method as claimed in claims 1-3, wherein said protein has the ability to bind ssRNA from a virus to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex.

20　5. DNA construct or vector harboring the DNA sequence as claimed in claim 4 in combination with suitable regulatory sequences (promoter, terminator, enhancer, nuclear localization signal etc.).

6. The DNA construct or vector as claimed in
25　claim 5, wherein the promoter is a viral subgenomic promoter.

7. The DNA construct or vector as claimed in claim 6, wherein the viral subgenomic promoter is the promoter of the coat protein gene of Potato Virus X
30　(PVX).

8. The DNA construct or vector as claimed in claims 5-7, further comprising a nuclear localization signal to ensure entry of the non-viral single stranded RNA binding protein into the nucleus.

35　9. The DNA construct or vector as claimed in claims 5-8 for use in transformation into a biological

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system which allows expression of the encoded protein or
an active part thereof.

10. Use of the DNA construct or vector as
claimed in claims 5-8 in transformation into a biological
5 system which allows expression of the encoded protein or
an active part thereof.

11. Use as claimed in claim 10, wherein the
suitable biological systems include yeast, cultured cells
(such as insect cells, mammalian and plant cells) and
10 plants and animals.

12. Host organism having improved resistance to
viral infection said host containing recombinant DNA
which expresses a non-viral protein capable of binding to
ssRNA from said virus to form a non translatable RNA-
15 protein complex.

13. Host organism as claimed in claim 12,
wherein the host organism is a plant cell.

14. Plant cells transformed with recombinant
DNA constructs or vectors according to claims 5-9.

20   15. Plant cells according to claim 13 or 14 for
use in the regeneration of whole plants in which the new
nuclear material is stably incorporated into the genome.

16. Transgenic plant having stably incorporated
into its genome a DNA sequence encoding a non-viral
25 protein having the ability to bind to ssRNA from said
virus to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex.

17. Transgenic plant as claimed in claim 16
obtainable by regenerating a plant cell according to
claims 13 or 14 into a whole plant.

30   18. Transgenic plant as claimed in claim 16 or
17 for use as a parent in standard plant breeding crosses
to develop hybrids and lines having improved viral
resistance.

19. Seeds showing improved resistance to viral
35 infection and having stably incorporated into their
genome a recombinant DNA sequence encoding a non-viral
protein having the ability to bind to ssRNA from said
virus to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex.

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20. Seeds as claimed in claim 19 obtainable from transgenic plants as claimed in claims 16-18 or their progeny.

21. Progeny of transgenic plants as claimed in
5 claims 16-18 showing improved resistance to viral infection and having stably incorporated into their genome a recombinant DNA sequence encoding a non-viral protein having the ability to bind to ssRNA from said virus to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex.

10   22. Progeny as claimed in claim 21 obtainable by germinating seeds as claimed in claim 19 or 20.

23. Genetically modified plant cells, plants or seeds as defined in claims 13-21 belonging to field crops, cereals, fruit and vegetables such as canola,
15 sunflower, tobacco, sugarbeet, cotton, soya, maize, wheat, barley, rice, sorghum, tomatoes, mangoes, peaches, apples, pears, strawberries, bananas, melons, potatoes, carrot, lettuce, cabbage, onion.

24. Recombinant protein having the ability to
20 bind ssRNA from a virus to form a non-translatable RNA-protein complex for use in providing virus resistance to an organism, in particular a plant or animal.
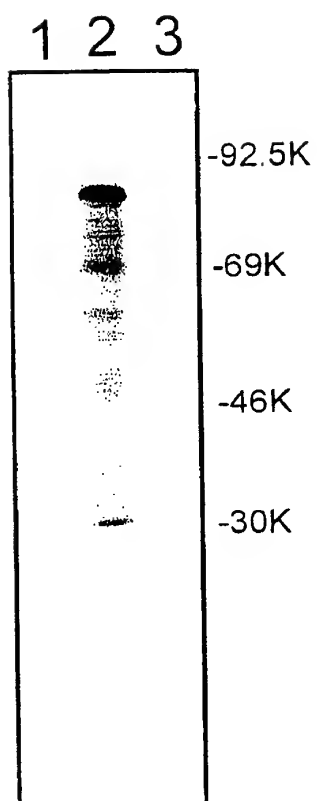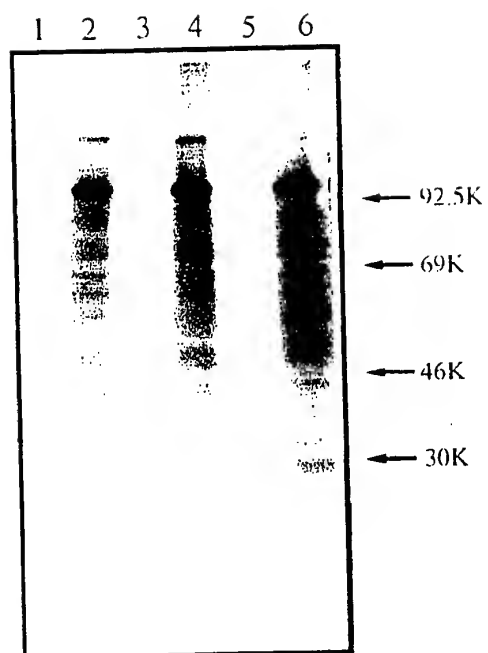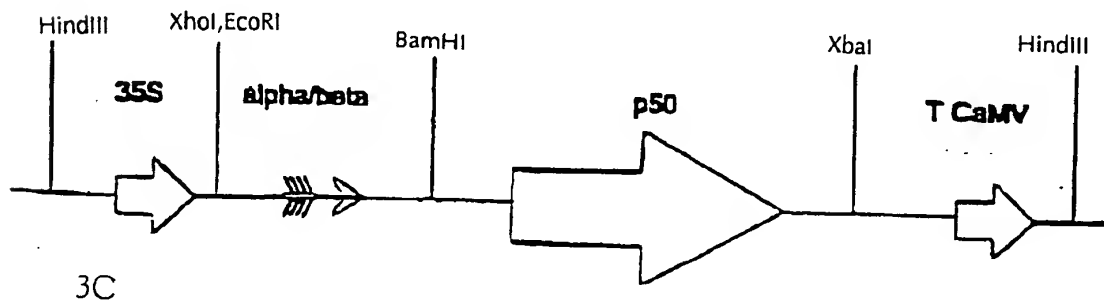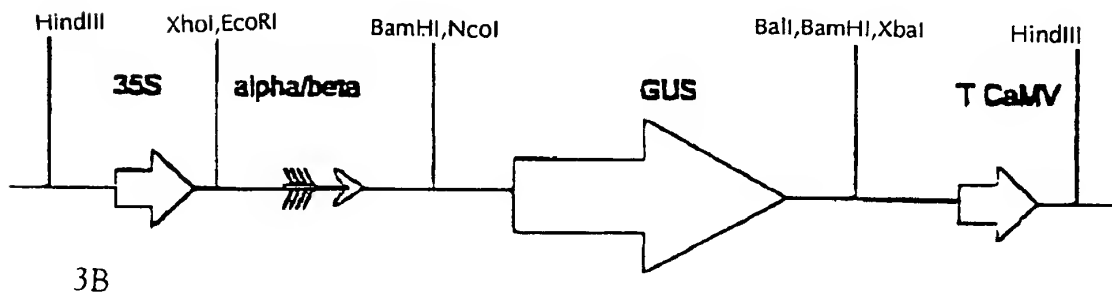
Figure 1

Figure 2

FIGURE 3

3A

3B

3C

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6   C12N15/82   C07K14/46   C07K14/47   C07K14/245   C12Q1/68 G01N33/53

According to International Patent Classification(IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 6   C12N   C07K   C12Q   G01N

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	BECK, D.L., ET AL. : "disruption of virus movement confers broad-spectrum resistance against systemic infection by plant viruses with a triple gene block" PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE USA, vol. 91, October 1994, pages 10310-10314, XP002073439 abstract, page 10310; 10311, right column, page 10313, 10314, Fig. 3 ---	1,2,4,5, 9-18, 20-24
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[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.	[X] Patent family members are listed in annex.

° Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

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"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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Date of the actual completion of theinternational search	Date of mailing of the international search report
3 August 1998	20/08/1998

Name and mailing address of the ISA European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer Holtorf, S

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C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDE BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication,where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDER~~BE~~ BE RELEVANT

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International Application No

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